

DELONG-BAS, NATANA J. 2008. WAHHABI ISLAM: FROM REVIVAL AND REFORM TO GLOBAL JIHAD. NEW YORK: OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS

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Post- 9/11, the fundamentalist Islamic groups have been called the primary serious threat by the West. Al-Qaeda, led by Osama bin Laden, had been leading such religious extremist movements. It is described as puritanical, misogynist, militant in nature and radical. Indeed, al-Qaeda is not alone Islamic group for this claim, the Taliban in Afghanistan and extreme conservative Islamic groups in Asia and the Isis in the Middle-East are the parts of groups. It is generally believed that Wahhabism as one of the Islamic sects is the root of those groups as the reason of intolerance and fanaticism. "Wahhabi teachings are often referred to as 'fanatical discourse' and Wahhabism itself has been called 'the most retrograde expression of Islam' and 'one of the most xenophobic radical Islamic movements that can be'" (p.3).

Wahhabi Islam: From Revival and Reform to Global Jihad is written by Natana J. DeLong-Bas, the American Professor, who is the specialist of Wahhabism. The aim of the book is to show that the claim that the doctrine -particularly global jihad- of al-Qaeda is based on Wahhabi creed, is entirely misunderstanding by analyzing deeply on the thoughts and theology of Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhab, the founder of Wahhabism. She, conversely, suggests he is more moderate, modernist and open-minded interpreter of Islam. Therefore, his theology and the interpretation of Islam could be revealed as a sophisticated, nuanced on the limitations on violence and destruction and also "calls for dialogue and debate as the appropriate means of proselytization and statecraft." (p.5) The content of the book is separated into six chapters which are the brief biography of the Muhammad Ibn Abd el-Wahhab and the origins of Wahhabism, the theology of Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhab, his doctrine on Islamic Law, women and gender in Wahhabism, the concept of Jihad in Wahhabism, the trajectory of Wahhabism respectively.

It is very obvious that the content of the book is well-organized and rich. Also the statements are explained clearly. However, it is hardly claimed that the book meets the objective in terms of interpreting his thought.

Firstly, with regard to the biography of Ibn Abd al-Wahhab, DeLong-Bas mainly relies on two historians: Ibn Ghannam (d. 1810) and Ibn Bishr (d. 1873) who are Wahhabis and their writings are based on the supporter view. Therefore, they emphasized the positive aspects of the sect. Hence, it is very clear that they had a particular religious and political agenda. In that case, an explanation of historical roots of Wahhabism are both inadequate and illusory.

Secondly, DeLong-Bas mostly misunderstands Ibn Abd al-Wahhab's theological doctrine. She explains the special status of Prophet Muhammad in Abd al-Wahhab's theology with three statements. First of all, according to Ibn Abd al-Wahhab, other prophets had disobeyed God in major or minor matter but Prophet Muhammad was the only prophet who never disobeyed God

(p.45). This is a misunderstanding of Abd al-Wahhab's theology because sinlessness is the one of the characteristics of all prophets in Islam and disobeying whether in a major or minor matter is an explicit sin so such a claim by a well-trained Islamic scholar is impossible. There is an agreement among Muslim scholars on the small mistakes of prophets, called as *zelle*, and those are not called as disobeying or sin. *Zelle* shows that there is no Perfect being other than God and prophets are like other human beings. In the light of this statement, Ibn Abd al-Wahhab could support that either the *zelle* of Prophet Muhammad were less than other prophets or his *zelle* were in a more minor matter than other prophets which seems less likely because this also contradicts with the concept of Nubuvvah.

Also, in the chapter of "Women and Wahhabis", she writes that Ibn Abd al-Wahhab denies the permission for having sex with a female slave for her master (p.130) although there is an agreement by other Islamic sects on the permission of such sexual relation by the interpretation of the verse in Qur'an: "And those who have preserved their chastity except regarding their spouses or what they possess by their right hands." (70:29-30) This also a wrong interpretation of Ibn Abd el-Wahhab because he acknowledges that Maria al-Qibtiyya, mother of Ibrahim, who was the one of the children of Prophet Muhammad, was a slave of him. In Islam, if a male master has a child from his slave, he has to free her and has to marry with her so Prophet Muhammad married with her after having Ibrahim. According to that, it is inconsistent belief for Ibn Abd al-Wahhab who asserts the fundamental character of hadith in Islamic Theology. Ibn Abd al-Wahhab denies forcing female slaves to having sex with them, not a sexual relation between her master and her.

Thirdly, she misses the relation between bid'ah and lesser shirk in his context. He asserts that bid'ah as a type of innovation causes lesser shirk so if anyone, who claims himself as a Muslim, innovates something, he is not Muslim but mushrik. However, she does not state this significant point in the section of lesser shirk and this causes an insufficient explanation of his thought because his main target to clean all innovations from Islam. Accordingly, content of bid'ah is very rich for him. As result of it, Wahhabism denounces almost all other Islamic sects as mushrik. The lack of explanation allows her to limit the Wahhabi's rejection with only Sufism and Shiism.

Another problem is her presentation style of Ibn Abd al-Wahhab's thoughts on women's rights and their roles in society. Woman and Wahhabis are the largest chapter of the book. Having read the chapter, one, who has not any knowledge about Islam, likely comes to the idea that Ibn Abd al-Wahhab is the first sheikh who interpreted the fundamental sources of Islam correctly in terms of women rights. However, Woman's rights are the basic rules of Islam and almost all Islamic sects substantially agree on them.

Finally, the distinction between the Ibn Abd al-Wahhab and Osama bin Laden with regard to the concept of jihad is problematic. She coherently distinguishes the concept of jihad by the former as a defense in local sense and only a collective duty from the latter's understanding as the necessarily fundamental intent for both individual or community in a global sense. Hence, she concludes that Wahhabism is not the cause of puritanical, misogynist, militant in nature and radical contemporary Islamic movements such as al-Qaeda. According to the recent position of Wahhabism, the conclusion seems to be inconsistent. This is very obvious that there are various distinct differences between Ibn Abd al-Wahhab's doctrine and contemporary Wahhabism

because social movements are modified throughout the history. Interpretations are shaped according to existing conditions. On the one hand, the claim that the contemporary extreme Islamic groups are inspired by only Wahhabism is an unjust totality as much as DeLong Bas' argument but on the other hand, contemporary Wahhabism inspired by Ibn Abd al-Wahhab's thoughts that the revival of purity of Islam provides the conservative ground for radical contemporary Islamic movements.

Hence, the book is accessible by its linguistic and sufficient for the followers of Wahhabism in order to defend against the claims that being the reason of intolerance and terror. Also the shaped figure of Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhab as the modernist and open-minded interpreter of Islam, particularly in terms of Muslim - non-Muslim relations and women rights provides the improvement of the political relations between Saudi Arabia and Western countries. However, it cannot satisfy the people who have at least intermediate knowledge about Wahhabism and Islam.